MY RAGPICKER

MARY E. WALLER

Edward Marlay Van Cleve

DISCARD

MY RAGPICKER

THE WORKS OF

MARY E. WALLER

MY RAGPICKER

THE WOOD-CARVER OF 'LYMPUS

THE LITTLE CITIZEN

A DAUGHTER OF THE RICH

SANNA

A YEAR OUT OF LIFE

FLAMSTED QUARRIES

OUR BENNY

THROUGH THE GATES OF THE NETHERLANDS

MY RAGPICKER

BY

MARY E. WALLER

Author of "The Wood-Carver of 'Lympus," "Flamsted Quarries," "A Year out of Life," etc.

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1911

Copyright, 1911,
By Mary E. Waller.

All rights reserved, including the right of translation

Published, October, 1911

THE · PLIMPTON · PRESS · NORWOOD · MASS · U · S · A

MY RAGPICKER

MY RAGPICKER

WHAT a stately dame!

You think I'm dreaming?

Oh, no, only seeing visions.

You know my weakness; indulge me.

What was I saying about the lady?

Oh, you all know her — Notre Dame of Paris. But do you know anything about the quarter of the Buttes-Chaumont? Anything of its weedy wastes where the butchers of La Villette keep their cattle? Of its by-ways and blind alleys, of its tumble-down sheds and glaring lime-washed huts and houses? Do you know anything of its poverty and filth?

You don't? What, you art-fledglings, who gaze so often on the majesty of Notre Dame, know nothing of the forsaken humanity that herds in the vicinity of the Buttes-Chaumont — that foundling life over which the gracious dame you so much admire keeps watch and ward?

No? Very well, then; let me dream on for a short hour until you see the cathedral of Notre Dame from the quarter of the Buttes-Chaumont and with the eyes of my little Paris ragpicker.

Ah, ah, now you are interested! Very good, gentlemen; you think I am going to tell you what my little Nanette told me out under the acacias in the park the other evening?

Well, why not? After all it will do you no harm, you art-fledglings of a year with the down on your lips as green as the paint on your palettes. We're good comrades, and I bear you no ill; we understand one another, as men, and, in a way, we are all honorable.

Only in a way, you think?

That may be; but, jesting apart, it will do you no harm, my friends, to have a little white soul — there is such even if it be but a ragpicker's — laid bare before you. I shall handle it reverently enough, and so far as you are concerned — well, possibly life on that side has some heights which you, my yearlings, with your Icarus wings will fail to reach, and certain depths

which your art-plummet will never sound.

What did Nanette say?

Patience, patience; all in good time. What storm-petrels you are, to be sure! I'm coming to that presently. You don't know, then, that in some of the most obscure and unfindable courts of the Buttes-Chaumont the ragpickers hive as well as thrive? — A true folk type they are too; interesting study, I assure you, humanly considered.

What do you say, Cupidon? You've never been up early enough to see them?

So I thought. Mistress Art catches her boys napping after a night's carousal, eh? I'm up and at my case-

ment good three hours before your true Parisian is astir. I like to see the shadows sharpen on the chimney pots of Rue Laffitte. About six months ago, I began to rise even an hour earlier, and every morning, on opening the shutters, the same living picture met my eyes — not an unwelcome one, I assure you: always a refuse-heap on the sidewalk and beside it a little figure in a faded blue cotton gown and a fabulous headgear that all but concealed her face. On her back was the rag-sack, the grotesque hump of which wholly disfigured as well as concealed any lines of grace she may have possessed.

At first, the dexterous movements of her hands riveted my attention —

the hands themselves for that matter, small, shapely, begrimed — your romance in all honor, gentlemen! — to the extent that they were crustaceous.

It was marvellous how she managed her iron pick; its movement seemed incessant in her hands. First there was a quick dive, like a swallow's angle; then a skilful toss and, although she never once looked behind her, the bit of refuse, whether rag, food, string or paper, straightway took its certain flight into the sack which gradually assumed such gigantic proportions that a general overturn seemed inevitable. But no; having filled it to bursting, the indefatigable little worker shook herself free of the un-

appetizing accumulations, and disappeared down the street — Rue Laffitte, you know it — swinging her sceptre with all the royal aplomb of her profession.

An interesting study, I assure you; and none the less so did it become when, as I was watching her one morning, an untoward event was the means of bursting this chrysalis and setting free the genuine Psyche that was concealed therein. A woolen-wound wire, which she had evidently mistaken for a string, had by some means become firmly fixed in a joint of the curbstone. The pick as usual performed its service, but the stubborn wire refused to yield, and the sack, given the transferred momentum,

took sudden flight over the little ragpicker's head.

Having righted herself, and evidently vexed at the unwarrantable delay, a second dive of the pick was intended to finish matters speedily. Putting forth all her strength, she tugged at the wire which, with the depravity inanimate things sometimes display, suddenly, and without warning, carromed on my shutter. From the gutter rose a cloud of dust, rags and paper; for a moment chaos reigned; then my vision cleared only to be dazzled by what I saw: the sack lay in the gutter, and on it, minus the headgear, the loveliest piece of budding womanhood it has been my good fortune to see since I put on an eyeglass.

My rooms are on the ground floor; it was only a short leap, you understand.

I helped her to her feet, and took my reward in looking my fill. She fell to work with a ringing laugh and a "Thank you, monsieur," the mere remembrance of which kept me in good humor for a week.

You want to know what she was like?

Just picture to yourselves a graceful girl of seventeen, slim as a willow shoot, but round and soft as a baby, with a head that would make suicides of you all if you were to attempt to paint it; a complexion of moon white — I've seen such occasionally at the Hippodrome, I remember a famous

bareback rider of the old régime had it — colorless, yet indicative of perfect health, the Madonna there in Dresden comes the nearest to it; eyes large-irised, full, lids drooping a little at the corners, like the Empress Eugénie's in the time of the empire — but you don't remember that — and the color, heaven knows what! Something to match the hair which rippled away from her forehead and fell in chestnut-brown waves to her waist; nose piquant, chin not wholly round, mouth perfect, and a set of teeth! But how can I tell you? A piece of nature like that puts the whole vocabulary of art to shame.

As I said, I looked my fill, for that morning, be it understood, and my

captivating ragpicker, having completed her task, bade me good-bye in a voice brim full of cheery good will, and swung off down the street, leaving me the wire as a souvenir, and a seat on the curbstone dressed as I was in becoming bedroom négligé.

How long did I sit there?

Have done with your questions! Oh, well, if you must know, two hours; for, between ourselves, there are two alternatives in Paris I dread like the pest: to enter my room with the night police out in full force, or to rouse a sleepy concierge at the unheard-of hour of five in the morning.

Perhaps it is not necessary to add that the next morning, with the first

streak of gray in the east, I was at my window.

There she was, my Psyche of ragpickers, hard at work in her usual regimentals! She gave a quick upward glance, an entrancing smile, and I, forgetting certain twinges induced by the rheumy air of the curbstone the day before, was at her side, this time in full dress.

"Good-morning, Mademoiselle Ragpicker," I said.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Up-before-the-sun!"

They have mother wit, this tribe, and a language of their own. Characteristics are seized upon and personified in a trice, but the cognomen sticks thereafter like a burr. The

morning was a chilly one in March, you know the kind, when the Seine has the asthma and the chestnuts in the Bois drip with the fog. The piquant nose had a purple tinge about the nostrils and the mouth a drawn expression that, somehow, went to my heart.

"It must be dismal enough for you, mademoiselle, in this weather," I ventured, for there was that about her that warned me not to poach too abruptly on her preserve.

"Oh, no, monsieur," she replied in a voice exquisitely cadenced, "I am contented with my lot."

My friends, it's a night for confessions. I had risen at daybreak to win a smile from one who, I supposed,

was a grisette of a ragpicker, and, to my keen humiliation, had received a sermon, that put my years to shame, from a gutter philosopher. Contentment! I had been seeking it, cultivating it to the best of my ability since my youth, vainly trying to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles, and here, at last, I was confronted with it in the gutter! Well, as ye sow, so shall ye reap—true, true, I've read that somewhere. But what was I saying?

I was staggered but not daunted.

"Mademoiselle —?"

She supplemented the unfinished interrogation with the frankness of a child:—

"Call me Nanette, monsieur."

"Well, then, Nanette, now that you have finished your work, will it lessen your content to take a glass of wine and a biscuit with me around the corner? At least, it will serve to preserve your complexion till breakfast."

Lend me your tobacco pouch, Cupidon, the chamois one, till I rub my glasses — they blur like the devil; my eyes are getting too old for them.

I can never forget the look on her face as I somewhat hesitatingly proffered my escort. For a moment, manlike and fool that I was, I thought it was I who had called forth the beatific look which would have made Del Sarto immortal had he caught the like for one of his madonnas; but I was quickly undeceived. With peculiar

grace she carried her hand to her heart — do you remember that hand of Rotari's Magdalen over in the Dresden gallery? It was like that, barring, excuse me, the crustations.

"Oh, monsieur, you are good." Tears sprang to the beautiful eyes and she finished with what was intended for a laugh, but, in reality, was only a second remove from a suppressed sob. "How could you know I was so hungry!"

"Because after such work as this," — I poked the bulging sack with my cane and trusted to its not squeaking at my lie, like the horsehide in the fairy tale, — "I should be, and I know you must be, for it's the early bird that catches the worm."

I made shift to answer thus, not very coherently, it must be confessed, for my feelings had undergone altogether too powerful a revolution during the five minutes in which I stood by her side.

Need I say that the next half hour was the happiest of my life? For, at last, that life had an object, and I was successful in attaining it. My little ragpicker, seated at a table of my petty restaurateur, who for an extra fee outdid himself in serving an early repast, devoured rolls, coffee and cheese — cheese, coffee and rolls, until my bewildered senses had not credited what they recorded if, at the finish, the lack of my sole five franc piece in my vest pocket had not

furnished convincing proof. I concluded, indeed, and so would you, had you been there, that the digestive apparatus of the species ragpicker must be somewhat different from that of ordinary mortals, and closely allied to that of the quadruple-stomached ruminants.

"A thousand thanks, monsieur;" she sprang from her seat the moment she had finished, no loitering on her part, and curtsied with a grace a belle of the Élysée might envy; "you may label me now 'full' like the omnibusses, and —," there was a pause, a sudden twitching of the corners of her mouth together with a tightening of the muscles of her throat, "it's the first time in my life that I remember."

And then —

Hurry?

No, I won't. Give me that bit of chamois again. The devil take your impatience, you yearlings. Give me time, and I will tell you all; why hurry? We have the night before us.

You recall the woman in the vaudeville who is happy at fifty because, at last, she experiences a genuine emotion? I count myself happy with her. With a curious birdlike movement, Nanette seized my hands in both her little grimy ones, and for four paradisiacal seconds (I know, for I counted them, comrades, by my loud heartbeats), I felt the pressure of her perfect lips thereon and the

warm droppings of four tears — numerically exact, 'pon honor! Then, shouldering her sack and seizing her pick, she went out into the gray misty morning and was lost to sight before I recovered from my — emotion.

Our friendship blossomed apace after that. A good comradeship established itself between us, founded on a peculiar relationship which we recognized in each other's manner, but of which we never once spoke. On her side there was the confiding frankness of a child; on mine — well, a quarter of a century ago when I was your age, I ought to have hung a millstone around the neck of my Mistress Art, who has brought me to bankruptcy in affection, and contented myself

with human relationships like other men. At times when I think of this, I indulge myself with the thought that I, too, might have had some graceful will-o'-the-wisp of seventeen to call me father — some ravishing bit of womankind that I could claim for my very own, flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone —

You think I'm dreaming now? Yes — yes; but no more of your interruptions. Let me tell you, in a word, that my feelings towards the girl were those of fatherly protector and, excuse me, commissary general. I saw to it that she never went hungry after that.

I never, however, interfered with her work and I never accompanied

her on her rounds. She drew the line sharply between her professional and — social life; but we always found time for an exchange of curbstone courtesies, followed by coffee and rolls at our restaurateur's. Her sprightly prattle pleased me although delivered in a jargon scarcely intelligible, — these people have a curious method of supplementing and transposing vowel sounds, — but I readily learned it and was soon initiated into the mysteries of the profession which acquired new interest from my acquaintance with this waif of the streets.

Twice she had a half holiday. The first time I took her out to Fontainebleau; I thought a bit of the real would do her good after spending her

life among such artificial abominations. But no; she was ill at ease; she longed for the city, and again and again during the long spring afternoon she sought an opening in the woods and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed long and steadily Pariswards. I failed to interpret her manner, but that did not surprise me. She was a prismatic little creature, and in her many-sidedness I found a unique charm that whetted as well as piqued my masculine curiosity. I determined, however, that the next half holiday's pleasure should be self-chosen.

Imagine my surprise, then, when to my morning question: "Where shall we go this afternoon, Nanette?" she

made answer, carrying her hand to her heart with that peculiar gesture which I had come to learn accompanied some powerful agitation of her impulsive nature: —

"Oh, monsieur, let us go to Notre Dame!"

Had she proposed a visit to the great sewers, or the kitchens of Saint Louis, I should have been less nonplussed; for the Hippodrome I was fully prepared—but Notre Dame! What could a ragpicker want of Our Lady of Paris?

I had not renewed my acquaintance with the interior of the cathedral for years; with the exterior, as you know, I am chronically in love. However, I acquiesced without demur and ap-

pointed to meet her that afternoon on the Pont de l'Archevêché; but I confess I was puzzled. I had long known that on her way homewards mornings she took a roundabout way, passing through the great square of Notre Dame, for I had followed her, unbeknown, to see if, perchance, my faith in her innocent child nature might have been misplaced. There was never anything to shake my confidence; now and then a barter of merry words with the members of her profession, but always straight on, turning neither to right nor left as she passed the workmen from Belleville. I was satisfied, and laughed at my ungrounded fears as I watched the little tatterdemalion whose angelic

beauty was wholly disguised beneath the old kerchief, with its accretions of apparent generations, and the huge rag-sack under which her lithe body bent as if weighted with three score years. Who, not knowing, would trouble himself to turn twice to look at a dirty Paris ragpicker? Not knowing! Ay, ay.

That afternoon I prepared to be entertained — Notre Dame with a ragpicker for cicerone! Delicious, wasn't it?

I stood leaning on the parapet, looking at Our Lady — you know the view — when I felt a hand laid on my arm. I looked down, not recognizing it at first, for it was clean, and met Nanette's face upturned to mine with

the rapt expression of a Cecilia in ecstasy.

"Monsieur," her hand went to her breast, "is she not beautiful?"

"Who, Nanette?" I asked in some surprise.

For answer she pointed to the cathedral, her eyes dwelling upon it with an intensity that startled me. So she continued to stand, lost to me and the world around her, while I drank in her beauty, oblivious of the inquisitive eyes that were soon turned upon us, or rather her. Nor could I blame them. She had laid aside her disfiguring headdress, and vigorous ablutions in some convenient fountain had brought out in all its delicacy the moon-white tint of face and neck.

The rippling hair about her forehead had dried in close clustering curls that glinted in the sunshine like a saint's aureole. In unconscious grace she leaned with clasped hands on the parapet, her rapt gaze fixed on the magnificent apse of Notre Dame.

It was time to be going.

"Come, Nanette," I said, and, slipping her hand into mine, fairly led her into the cathedral.

The girl's demeanor that April afternoon was to me a psychical revelation. Some powerful spiritual agency was at work within her; some indefinable influence that, strengthened by the environment, played upon her intense emotional nature, till her body thrilled response. The ever-changing expres-

sion of the marvellous eyes — the constant dilation and contraction of the pupils — the tremulous movement of chin and lips, the outward curve and inflation of the sensitive nostrils, together with the pliant sway of her supple body and the sudden rigor that, at times, seemed to transfix the muscles — all this, I say, indicated more plainly than words some strange, spiritual metamorphosis.

My children, slaves to Art that you are, there may come some rare epoch in your lives to compensate for such serfdom. Art, absolute mistress that she is, claims us for her own eternally, both body and soul; but, in compensation, she gives us a few transient hours like those I passed with

my ragpicker in Notre Dame, and, with them, the deeply harmonious seeing eyes that alone can appreciate such a creation of the Creator's: a creature in whose body divinity must surely dwell, such is its perfectness, and animated by a soul to interpret that indwelling divinity in such ever-varying grace of face and figure that beauty becomes religion, and Art, true worship.

I showed her all there was to see, even to the cases filled with costly robes and altar-cloths. The attendant looked — looked did I say?

No, no, Cupidon; it is you who are dreaming now; hands off your rapier. Why, my boy, your blue eyes are ablaze already! Softly, softly, my

son; wait until I have told you the rest. I forgave him on account of his youth, and you would have done the same.

We spoke but little. Evidently the girl was but half aware of my protecting presence. In silence we watched the light from the setting sun flame against the great rose window — crimson, violet and gold, amethystine purple, cerulean gray, then night. You have seen it before now, but not through the eyes of a ragpicker as I have. She stood quietly a moment in the porch.

"Good night, monsieur," she said absently, giving me both her hands; then she turned abruptly to go.

"What?" I held them longer than

I was wont; "going so soon, Nanette?"

"Yes, so soon, monsieur." She tried to smile, but there were tears in her voice.

"But one word before you go, Nanette. Will you not give me a holiday soon and take me to the Buttes-Chaumont to show me your home and the tricks of the trade?"

"Gladly, monsieur; it will be a pleasure to show you all you wish to see — but 'home'? I don't understand."

"Never mind that now, Nanette; tell me," I lifted her face on the palm of my hand; I thought I had a clue to her afternoon mood, "tell me, have you a mother?"

God knows why I put that question

— I don't. It was not premeditated; if it had been, I could have been held for soul-murder at least. As it was, I felt guilty of manslaughter.

Instantly the lines of her face grew rigid; the nostrils sharpened; her cheeks hollowed visibly. Then the mental agony she was evidently undergoing found vent in a hard-drawn breath, followed by a despairing cry, as she wrenched her hands free from mine and fled somewhither before I thought to turn to watch her flight.

I have heard one such cry before, on the left bank of the Seine — you know my haunts — a cry accompanied by a dull plash and two or three succeeding gurgles. That nameless cry and its twin, Nanette's, gave me no

rest. I wandered about the wastes of the Buttes-Chaumont during the small hours of the night, trying to find the ragpickers' hive.

What? You wouldn't have believed it of nine and forty?

Neither would I — at your age.

As well search for a weasel in a marmot's hole. With a freemasonry that baffled every effort at discovery of their habitat, the loyal residents of the Buttes-Chaumont put me again and again off the track. I saw nothing of her, heard nothing of her, and returned to Rue Laffitte just in time to see the girl shoulder her sack and hurry away.

There was something wrong; she had come an hour earlier in order to

avoid me, and her intent was to be off before I was up. I resolved to put an end to all such chicanery next morning, for our relations had been altogether too open and pleasant to permit anything equivocal at that late date. I was up betimes in consequence, and flung open my shutters. In the uncertain light I caught the glimmer of a lantern, flashing hither and thither about the heap of refuse like a belated will-o'-the-wisp. I had judged correctly. She was there.

"Nanette," — I spoke peremptorily, — "I want to speak with you. No, stop!" I added sharply, for she attempted to run.

The unusual tone had the desired effect. With an appealing glance and

a deprecatory gesture, she stood still. Then I joined her. But she was changed! At the first glance I could scarcely believe it was my little Nanette who had been so contented with her lot. Heavy blue rings, circling her eyes, gave them a strained unsteady look. Directly over each eyebrow, a red, purple-veined swelling, evidently the result of prolonged weeping, disfigured the full white forehead; the mouth looked pinched and sunken; from time to time the corners twitched nervously. I felt strangely blood-guilty.

"Nanette," I essayed to speak as usual, "you owe me a holiday now. Will you not take me to-day, this very morning, to the Buttes-Chaumont?"

She hesitated. But I — well, I have a nose to scent a mystery, and I determined to find out the child's environment before I passed another night *al fresco*. Had she denied me, I should have dogged her steps until I obtained some clue.

She felt this, and in her present state knew her will was no match for mine.

"Yes, monsieur," she said with effort, and fell to work with a nervous impetuosity that infallibly gauged the internal pressure.

I followed her closely on her rounds — she had refused the usual rolls and coffee, nor did I press her — and as she turned homewards, I noticed there was no détour through the cathedral square. We exchanged

no word. On she trudged, it must be confessed, with some abatement of royalty in her carriage, I following at a respectful distance. What a weary stretch! And the day's work scarce begun. Along the Boulevard La Villette, Rue de Belleville — it was still too early for many workmen — then through intricate streets and by-ways to the Place du Danube. After that I lost my bearings completely. In and out we made our way through a labyrinth of dusty passages and forsaken alleys, until we emerged into a sandy lane, or rather field-path that led up a hilly slope between piles of old boards, lime heaps, masses of jagged stone and ruins of decaying cattle-sheds.

Of a sudden Nanette turned a sharp angle; following her closely and entering a blind alley, I found myself before a wooden gate. It was bolted. Through a hole in the boards the girl thrust her hand, and the mysterious portal opened to admit us. I have never been able to reckon the number of the canine race that guarded this entrance. Cerberus-headed seemed each one, so conglomerate was the mixture of head and tail. With open jaws, and yelpings that ranged throughout the gamut, they hurled themselves upon us. However, a word from Nanette quieted them and they contented themselves with some abortive attempts at growling.

We were in a large weed-grown

court, and opposite to us was a one storey lime-washed house. On the threshold of the entrance stood a short thickset man of apparently thirty. The coarse blouse failed to hide the astonishing breadth of shoulder and strength of limb. His head was covered with an underbrush growth of coal black hair that bristled electrically straight up from his square forehead, and the deep-set eyes lowered at me from beneath heavy overhanging brows. His skin was a swarthy olive and, what struck me as noticeably strange, he was beardless. I was prepared for the *douche* which I had, in faith, at zero.

"Eh, Nanette! Back again so soon? At your old tricks again, I'll warrant."

I forgave him this ungracious speech for the voice in which it was delivered — rich, deep, full, it was cordial in spite of himself. All his surliness failed to impair its charming qualities.

"Monsieur," — I determined that the Buttes-Chaumont should bear witness to my courtesy at least, and besides, I wanted to shield Nanette, "my little friend here, Nanette, has offered, with your permission be it understood, to show me your establishment in which I am much interested."

He turned on his heel. They brook no interference — this tribe; the man was plainly chafing at this unwarranted visit. He thrust his hands into his blouse.

"As you please," he growled in his

rich bass, and with the air of a grand seigneur flung wide the door to his domicile.

I had a glimpse of two rooms with cemented floor, as I followed Nanette through the passage to the opposite door that opened on a large backyard which, in truth, was little more than a dung-heap. A fat porker wallowed in the morass; two or three goats nibbled at the leaves of an overhanging tree, and countless fowl — turkeys, hens, Spanish cocks, and pigeons of all breeds — perched and fluttered about this unique garden of the Hesperides.

Still following Nanette who as yet had spoken no word, I made a somewhat difficult passage across the second

court, and, passing through a gate in the rough board fence, was ushered into the regular establishment: a court similar to the first with an entrance from another blind alley, and surrounded by open sheds.

Here the "business," the sorting, was carried on. Even at that early hour, the sheds and court were filled with the morning's gleanings from which arose — not the perfumes of Araby, I assure you. A trio of loathsome hags, cadaverous, ash-gray, like those three ancient virgins of Greece, were hovering around the larger piles, vulture-like over the carrion! Meanwhile, a half dozen of dirt-encrusted, half-naked imps swarmed like vermin on the smaller heaps. And always

there was that incessant movement of the hands: — right, left, up, down, backwards and forwards they dived and picked and flung and tossed, till hither and thither and yon, each to its rightful deposit, flew glass, leather, wool, bones, cigar-stumps — "orphans" in their lingo — bread bits, drumsticks — but enough, O shades of chicken soup, and palate-tickling metamorphosis of the restaurateur's *haché!*

What, are you taking notes, Philosopher? You think you have found a subject sufficiently bizarre to win you the "first" at the next salon? I wish you joy; but you need the lights — the early morning ones, you know — the sun not yet an hour high and the uncertainty of dawn still creeping about

in the farthermost corners of the shed, and the gray waste of sandy court and dusty boards unrelieved save for some scrap of color in a rag-heap, or the glint of a bit of broken glass reflecting a cool sunbeam that, somehow, has found entrance through the worm-eaten fence.

Our arrival made no commotion. The sorters worked like automatons, subject to the keen eye of the overseer, the "apprentice" so-called. He cast a searching glance upon Nanette who ignored him wholly. She deposited her sack and returned to me.

"I was like that once, monsieur," she said, pointing to a corner of the shed.

I followed her gesture eagerly, for

they were the first words she had spoken. Straining my eyes to penetrate the gloom, I discerned a poor little mite, of some six years perhaps, naked save for an old woolen chemise of compromising color, and a three-cornered rag pinned, in lieu of a shawl, about her shoulders. She was seated á la turque beside a huge pile of broken glass made up wholly of the jagged necks of bottles and wine-flasks. From them she was industriously picking the resin and sealing wax, from time to time cracking off the more adhesive portions with a rusty nail.

Fancy her, my friends, this little waif of humanity thus earning her honest, ay, and honorable livelihood of four to eight sous a day, and then

tell me if, in the eyes of this our arrogant nineteenth century, that flaunts its banner in the face of the other eighteen, such a life would not appear, at best, an abortion? — Content with her lot! I turned to Nanette.

"How long ago was that?"

"Ten years, monsieur; but I was advanced" — it seems that even this career has its grades — "to sorter two years ago, and this spring to ragpicker." There was pride in her voice.

"And where do you live, Nanette? Take me to your home."

"Live? Do you mean where I sleep?" I saw she was puzzled.

"Yes."

"Come this way, monsieur." She passed out into the blind alley and

across it to a long low storehouse with a loft.

"The best rags, linen and woolen, are stored here. Monsieur Jean waits for a rise, then it is empty again. Can you climb?" She laid her hand on the round of a ladder that led to the loft.

"Try me," I said, and followed her as best I could up the Olympian staircase.

"Here's where we sleep." She spoke indifferently.

I looked down. The boards were unsteady; great cracks yawned between, and numerous knotholes served as convenient passages of communication for certain lean specimens of rats that vanished on our appearance.

I looked up. The steep-pitched roof was behung with masses of dusty cobweb that swept to and fro with the light stirring of the air occasioned by our entrance — shifting, swinging just above our heads like the gauze curtains in a spectacular piece

I looked around. Here and there was a pile of burlap used for packing rags, now converted into beds. That was all. It was getting too close for me in the uncanny hole; either the air or my thoughts were suffocating me. I went to one of the two windows that admitted what of light and air there was, flung it up and looked out.

Well, I thought I knew Paris from every coigne of vantage; knew her aspects in all her moods and tenses

of starlight, moonlight, sunlight, dawn and twilight; but never before had I seen the city of my adoption shaking off the morning mists like some godling Apollo bursting from his swaddling-clothes, and rising fair, shining, golden into the clear radiance of an hour-old sun! And over all towered the majestic form of Notre Dame, guarding like a titaness Themis of old the divine nurseling at her feet.

"Nanette, look!" I cried.

The girl was close beside me. I turned to look at her, and again I caught the rapt expression of devotion in her eyes.

"Yes, monsieur; I've seen it these many years. See, I sleep here on this pile under the window, and have only

to lift my head and look out when I want her help."

"Hers? Whose?"

"Our Lady's," she answered softly, and for a moment the old look of content relaxed the tense lines about her mouth. It was momentary only.

I was baffled, and realized for the first time why we men were not made mothers. I wanted to help, comfort, save her, if possible, but knew not how, and actually groaned aloud over my impotence. The sound startled her; but I took her hands in mine — not exactly the scenic setting for a display of sentiment, but the very one for a little outlay of sensibility, were a man not wholly a brute; you see I distinguish between the two.

"Can I help you, Nanette? You know I am your friend."

"I know, monsieur, but there is no help;" there was an echo in her voice of those twin cries of despair that haunted me so; "no help — none — except from —" She choked.

"From whom?" I asked half in suspense, half in fear of — I don't know exactly.

She returned me a silent answer, eloquent indeed for one who possessed the key to this mystery, but to me as enigmatical as this ragpicker waif of humankind with a soul. Leaning far out of the window, she stretched forth her hands towards Notre Dame with a supplicating gesture more pathetic than words, and stood so, motionless,

for fully a minute. Great tears welled in her eyes and overflowed upon her cheeks. Suddenly her arms dropped lifelessly; we heard the rumble of donkey-carts below in the blind alley.

"I must go now, monsieur; there is the work to be done." She spoke impassively, and in silence I followed her down the ladder and out into the alley. At the entrance to the court she turned.

"Three turns to the right, monsieur; three to the left, then across to the right by the cattle-market and so on down the alley into the Place du Danube."

This was my dismissal. She left me to find my way out as best I could

while experiencing the emotions of Daedalus.

I was far from satisfied, but what could I do? I feared — you know what; and as my faith in human nature has never been unbounded, I confess that the girl's actions reduced it to a minimum. Of course I attempted to extend our acquaintance a week longer, but each morning found Nanette with less appetite and an increased monosyllabic tendency in her conversation — a pregnant sign with your true Parisian that she is at variance with the world in general and herself in particular. To speak frankly, I was not sorry when business called me for the summer to the Riviera. The whole affair was a ball

that would unravel itself, if what I imagined was true; if not, I had the clue to her habitat, at least, and for the rest — what was a ragpicker to me?

What is that you say, Cupidon? — Did I lose all remembrance of her? What a question! How could I? From time to time a droop of the eyelids, a curve of the lips, the glint of the clustering curls in the sunshine on the Pont de l'Archevêché, the exquisite pose of the hand on her breast, the hands themselves, found their way into the picture of the Virgin and Child upon which I was at work. In fact, I was trying continually to catch the look on her face as, leaning far out of the window in the old loft, she

stretched out both hands towards Our Lady. It was the look of a "tired child yearning towards its mother's arms".

You want to know whether I was successful? Turn the canvas there, Cupidon — this way a little; there you have it. Whatever of best there is in mother and child is Nanette's, not mine. You see my curbstone acquaintance proved capital for me in a way.

It was force of habit, perhaps — perhaps not — that caused me on my return to fling open the shutters at the unheard-of hour of five in the morning. Sure enough, my eyes were greeted with the same living picture as before, not an unwelcome one, as

I have had occasion to assure you. At the sound, she lifted her head; there was a quick upward glance, an entrancing smile, and the accompanying merry voice: —

"Good morning, Monsieur Welcome-with-the-sun!"

Before returning her greeting, my sharp glance scanned her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. My eyes did not deceive me; my fears had been ungrounded, and my ragpicker was again "content with her lot". I confess I experienced a momentary, if purely masculine, pang that the gutter should have been able thus to assert itself without the aid of the ground floor — risen above it, indeed, for had not my most profound

philosophy been faced down by a single fact, that of contentment in the face of experience?

It was not long before we were seated as usual at our petty restaurateur's whose endless torrent of congratulation served, in a measure, to hide the exuberant philanthropy of the ground floor and the supreme satisfaction of the gutter. Coffee, rolls and cheese were devoured with their old-time avidity. We chatted and laughed, nor, when the meal was finished was my ragpicker in any hurry to depart.

"Now, tell me, Nanette, are you still contented with your lot?" In consideration of the abundant repast I ventured to ask her.

"Oh, monsieur!" — she seized my hand in hers and I awaited with intense interest the repetition of a former experience as an expression of her gratitude — "I am so happy, so content! I've been made 'rouleure' this week, and Linspré has given me a donkey-cart and a white bulldog. Oh, but you must see them, monsieur!" She flung aside my hand and caught up her pick.

I was confused; actually brought into unstable equilibrium by this explanation of her happiness. "Good heavens!" I thought, "is life worth living to be made such a shuttlecock of by a tricksy Paris ragpicker!" But aloud I said somewhat severely — for I was vexed with myself for

having wasted sentiment on a girl who could so far forget the misery she had been in, or at least find alleviation for it by means of the gift of a donkey and a white bulldog ("Ass!" so I prefaced my remark, but I was cursing a pessimistical biped): —

"You were not so contented always, Nanette; how was that?"

Instantly the light in her face was quenched; my extinguisher proved effectual, and I took courage.

"And who is this Linspré?" I demanded with additional severity; the vacant sensation on the back of my hand intuitively warned me that the anticipated kiss had been held in reserve for the donor of the white bulldog.

"Monsieur," she said with a dignity and gentle womanliness to which I could but render homage, "I could not tell you then; you could not have helped me—no one could but Our—" She hesitated. "You are my friend, monsieur, and I will tell you so gladly all — all, monsieur, do you understand what that means? What no one else knows but you — and Linspré." The last word broke on her lips in a happy smile.

"But when, where, how, Nanette?" I urged. This was my opportunity. She considered a moment.

"This evening, monsieur, under the trees by the little fountain, the stone one, in the Buttes-Chaumont park; you know where it is."

"On your word of honor, Nanette?" I was eager, I assure you; I could scarcely have believed it of an incorrigible pessimist like myself.

"Honor bright, monsieur." She dropped me a mock curtsy and shouldered her sack, remarking as she did so: —

"It's the last time; to-morrow I shall have my donkey-cart."

Friends, I've lost the knack of praying. I've not had a prayer on my lips since those days in Provence when my young mother, scarce remembered now, taught me one on her knee with kisses for punctuation. But this I know: — for that hour, at least, while I listened to Nanette under the acacias

in the park, my "soul was on its knees".

Art! Let the scribblers strain their rhetoric in search of it, and the whole Beaux Arts seek it, if they will, in the Salon or the Louvre — blind leaders of the blind! Art is divinity, understood rightly; its expression is humanity, and I say: "Seek *there*, if ye will find".

Yes, yes, Cupidon; you have been patient and I am done; the rest is Nanette's. When I think of it there is little to tell.

"Monsieur, I will tell you all that you may understand all."

This was Nanette's prelude out under the acacias in the park the other evening.

"One day, on the Boulevard Montmartre, I found myself, as you found me, monsieur, standing beside a pile of rags. I remember how small I felt beside it and how cold I was. I was picking out a few bits of mouldy bread that, by chance, I found in it, and thinking to get away before any one should see me. It was hardly light. Of a sudden, a heavy hand was laid on my shoulder and I was snatched away with as little care as I would fling an old shoe into the sack. I was in the hands of a 'rouleure' and I screamed with fright. The woman shook me till my tongue was bitten between my teeth and I spat blood. She stopped then. This was my meeting, monsieur, with Madame

Racineau, and her first words were: —

"'Who are you, vagabond?'

"'I don't know,' I sobbed. I was shaking with pain and fright.

"'Who are you, little liar? Where's your mother?'

"Monsieur, I had never heard that word. She turned to a gendarme my screams had brought to the spot.

"'Where's the mare to this foal?' she demanded. The man shrugged his shoulders and passed on.

"'Linspré!' she screamed; 'where are you?' An ugly enough lad came at her call, and at sight of him I cried the harder.

"'Here,' she said, and for all I know she flung me over to him

with her pick; I found myself in his arms.

"'Take the gutter-rat home with you and set her to gnawing resin. It'll be two hands the more, and I know by the shape they're nimble. As for the sack', — here she laid her hands with an ugly leer over her stomach, — 'it's not yet half grown, so little will fill it. Off with you, in the devil's name.'

"I remember all this, monsieur, but nothing more till I found myself in that same corner of the shed I showed you last spring, scratching off resin from broken bottle-necks. My hands were bleeding; my flesh was tender; it hardened soon enough.

"After that, I don't remember much

but that I worked month in, month out, through heat and cold. My food was flung to me with that of the dogs, and many a time I choked off the smaller curs from their morsel that I might eke out the day with less hunger. The few sous I earned went to fill Madame Racineau's wallet. The 'black wolf' we called her, for she was a terror to us all except Linspré. She called him 'apprentice,' that's the same as overseer, and he said his say and went his way when he pleased.

"I slept in the loft, when I was not lying awake faint from hunger, or crying for fear of the rats. 'Gutter-rat' she had called me, and I was not old enough to feel sure I was not of their kin. But after a time that fear,

too, was gone. Another took its place. I remember it only as a long nightmare — they have told me since it was war — but there came a time when the rats were sold for food, and I starved. How many days I can't say. The very dogs, monsieur, went to the butcher's and there was not a crumb in the establishment, for no longer were any rags brought in. I remember I chewed a little resin I found on an old flask, and then I think I must have gone mad with thirst. I was in the loft when I came to my senses, on the burlap under the window. It was night. I clung to the sill, raised myself and hung out my head. I was gasping for breath. There, monsieur, leaning so, dizzy and

sick from hunger, I saw for the first time Our Lady of Paris.

"There was a buzzing in my ears; a roaring in my head; I can't tell how it was. I only know that from the hills beyond the river other roars mixed with those in my ears, and flashes of fire, longer and broader than the sparkles that kept dropping before my eyes, tore their way through the sky, and smoke clouds kept floating up, and settling down before me. It was all so confused. The only thing plain to me was that great form rising out of the smoke into the moonlight and stretching up its two arms as if to bring down help for all of us.

"From that moment I loved her, monsieur; and when, a little while

after — whether a day or days I do not know — the roaring from beyond the river ceased and there was bread again — not enough, but it broke the hunger, I used to kneel there by the window and eat my portion with my eyes fixed on Our Lady.

"I was never let to roam. The 'black wolf' kept me close. I was too young, too afraid to venture much; but when she died, Linspré gave us a day off, for he was head of the business.

"I started out then to find Notre Dame. I knew I could find it somewhere, somehow. I found myself, after hours and hours, in a park with children, other than I had ever seen, coming and going, free as air. I heard them calling: — 'Mamma, mam-

ma, come here! See this, dear mamma!' I looked and listened till I could bear it no longer; then I crept away under the bushes with a hunger in my heart worse, monsieur, than any I had had in those nightmare days, for I kept hearing their shouts:—'Mamma, mamma!' I sobbed myself to sleep.

"I must have lain there two or three hours, for when I awoke it was near sunset, and I was very hungry. In my hurry to get away from the sheds I had not taken my portion with me, and since morning there had been added this hunger in my heart.

"I left the park, wandering on and on, never tiring, for all was so new and strange that I half forgot why I was there at all. Night was coming

on and, somehow, I had to get back to the Buttes-Chaumont. I pressed my face against a restaurant window and tried to believe I was eating with the women who were talking and laughing at little round tables that shone so under the lights; but I only drooled on the pane. I sat down in a doorway to watch the crowds of people. I wondered, like the child I was, where all the rags came from when every one was so well dressed. I remember it had grown so dark that a flutter of white from the pocket of a woman's coat caught my eye. — Do you know, monsieur, I think people steal sometimes without knowing it? It was only a flip-flap of white, but it was like a clutch at my empty stomach.

I sprang forward; crept close to the woman's side; took the bit of lace between my thumb and forefinger — but, oh, monsieur! I got no farther. The goose-flesh rose all over my body. I thought I heard a voice, I think now I did: —

"'Take it Nañette; it is only a rag in the end.'

"I turned around half crazed with fright at what I knew not. I looked about, then up, and there — oh, monsieur, can I ever forget it! — there across the square, her great arms uplifted as if to fall and crush me, stood Our Lady!

"I had strength only to hide my face in my hands; then some one took me in his arms, and Linspré, for it was

he, monsieur, spoke and his voice sounded hoarse and fierce; I remember wishing it sounded as his arms felt: —

"'Eh, Nanette, lagging thus after dark? It's time you were back. Come with me.'

"Once in the loft, I hid in the burlap, not daring to raise my head lest I should see Our Lady; and so, without the comfort of a morsel, I lay there half waking, until dawn. My God! What have I not suffered, monsieur!"

My friends, her voice broke there for the first time, and she sobbed helplessly for full a minute before she could speak.

"Monsieur," she continued, "I can't help crying over the child that

I was. Had I been fed even, the misery had scarcely been less; for that hunger in my heart kept gnawing, gnawing, day in, day out — no rest, no rest; and always the sound of that word, mamma, in my ears. I had no mother, could have none. The thought was a long sickness, and I shunned the streets for fear of hearing the like again, and stole away to the loft after work was done to find what comfort I could in looking at Notre Dame, for we were friends again, Our Lady and I.

"Two years ago, Monsieur Jean advanced me to 'sorter.' Linspré is only his nickname; it means 'prince,' you know. I had but littlé to do with him. He paid me with the rest;

never found fault, but never praised; no word for or against. He let me alone, and I was glad enough, for he was strict with the others.

"A year ago he sent me out on a 'beat' for two weeks. 'Just to get your hand in,' he said. My station was in front of a hotel, and often in the early morning hours there were carriages coming and going filled, so I was told, with the world that works at play nights, and sleeps days. Once, searching with my lantern about the pile I flashed it full upon a woman who had just got down from her carriage, and was entering the hotel. It was then I dropped my pick, monsieur. She was so beautiful! The street seemed darker when the door

shut upon her. A few mornings after that, I found a jewelled collar-stud caught in a strip of flimsy tulle. I felt sure it belonged to her — to her, and no other. I find many a shirt-stud or cuff-button now, but that was my first. It's a point of honor with us ragpickers never to keep a 'find,' and I was glad of the chance to tell Monsieur Jean about it. He let me off early in the afternoon, and I went back to the hotel with it. I showed it to the concierge. Did she think it belonged to *her*, the beautiful woman? I asked.

"'Yes, to be sure.'

"'Then I will give it to her myself,' I said; and the woman let me have my way. I found the one I was

seeking on the second floor. She was so pleased; I saw that by her face.

"'What do you want for it, little —' She was going to say something else, I don't know what, but stopped short, biting her lip to keep from laughing.

"She was tall and fair, monsieur. Her blue eyes laughed down into mine, and her voice sounded so sweet, so gay, that I took courage to ask for that for which, at that moment, I would have given my life. She could not know — how could she? — that the hunger in my heart was leaping to my lips. I thought if I could kiss her once, just once, as those children kissed their mother in the park, that the hunger of those years would pass away. I could scarcely speak; my

tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth; but I said at last: —

"'I want to kiss you, madame.'"

Comrades, I am convinced that a woman's nature is always dormant volcanic, its deepest depths always stirring, seething, ready for action; yet enduring, thickly encrusted with the graces of so-called civilization, awaiting some unbearable surcharge of emotion before venting its disruptive power of passion.

Thus far, Nanette had spoken quietly, with little apparent effort and without interruption save for the tears she had shed at first. But at those last words, she sprang to her feet and walked rapidly back and forth before me. Her hands were clenched;

her nostrils dilated. She broke forth incoherently, rapidly; her voice shook as if shivered on the lance of her wrathful speech: —

"And they dare call themselves mothers! These women who give suck and yet have no drop of human kindness in their white breasts they so love to show! They dare even to call themselves women — these creatures who, with hearts of flesh and blood like ours, can only feel for their puling lapdogs! Why did she not kill me then and there? She might as well, as to answer as she did.

"What think you, monsieur? Was she a woman or a she-devil that could stand there, smiling down at me, a young thing starving for love, and

shrugging her shoulders, draw away from me as if I had come from the pest-house, saying in her gay voice: —

"'Oh, anything but that, child! Here, give her this.' She motioned to her maid who pressed a franc piece into my hand.

"How I got out I don't know; I found my way to the street somehow.

"'Go you to the devil!' muttered the concierge as I pushed past her, and I laughed back: —

"'Yes, yes — I'm going fast enough.' I meant what I said.

"There was a burning spot on the palm of my hand; it was the silver piece. I flung the cursèd thing far from me; I heard it clink on the

stones, and the sound eased me. I could walk more steadily after hearing it, and I went on to the river. I knew well enough when I was near the cathedral. I did not mean to look up, but I could not help it. I would look once, just once, I said to myself, just once before —

"Monsieur, can stones speak? What made my eyes grow wet as I looked and my heart beat in my throat? Why did I pass in with the crowd at the open door over the threshold of which I had never dared to step? Why did I do this when my will was to do the other? Can you tell? I can't.

"I found myself in an empty space; I clung fast to one of the stone pillars

wetting it with my tears; I pressed my lips to it. Then at last, I was content. I knew that I, too, had a mother whose stones would prove a safer resting-place for my aching head than the white breasts of those other-world women from whom I was set apart, and to whom I could not belong. I was content for the first time in my life that I remember. I felt I could bear anything after that. When I should again be hungry in my heart, I knew I had a mother to bid me live and not despair.

"I could scarcely wait for the spring when I was to be made ragpicker. To be out in the world with the rest; to go and come in the sunshine; to see Our Lady every day; to go to her

for help when I pleased. I found you, too, monsieur, and I was so happy, so content when you first knew me, so grateful for all you did for me. I felt it was a poor reward to show you in any way that, little by little, the content was slipping away. I tried not to show it; but you asked me that question in the porch of Notre Dame, you remember, and that word, 'mother', set every limb to trembling and my heart to aching with the old-time hunger. I rushed away from you and hid myself down by the arches of one of the lower bridges, and spent myself with sobbing 'mother, mother'. And at last, when I could cry over myself no longer, I fell to crying afresh over the lambs I heard

bleating in the slaughter-house yonder. I was like them.

"Do I tire you, monsieur?" she asked suddenly, seating herself beside me and questioning me with her eyes.

"Tire me," I said; "what put that into your head, Nanette?"

"You look tired, monsieur. I would not have told you all this only — you asked —"

"Yes, yes, I know, Nanette; and if I look tired it is only because I have a headache, perhaps a wee heartache — for the lambs, and the continuation of your story is the only cure for it. You see, Nanette, I am just beginning to understand."

"Are you, monsieur?" The moon-

light brightened her happy smile. "Then I will tell you the rest."

The truth is, friends, life was revealing itself to me on a side that, hitherto, had been in total eclipse so far as I was concerned, and the strain was telling on me. But for her, on the other hand, life, as it had until then been viewed by me, would also have had its adumbrations; so how was I to enlighten her as to the real cause of my apparent weariness? A master metaphysician might possibly find himself in such case on the horns of a dilemma none the softest.

During the remainder of the recital, the girl sat quietly beside me, her hands clasping her knees; except for the touch of white on her knuckles,

I should not have realized there was much effort for control. Her voice, grown monotonously even, sank at times almost to a whisper as she parted the veil of her holy of holies and showed me — a woman's soul aflame upon its altar.

"Monsieur, one day in spring, a few weeks before you took me out into the country for that afternoon, I found a long piece of tulle in the rag-heap. There was yard upon yard of it, little used. I saved it; and the next morning went to work a little earlier that I might have time afterwards to myself down by one of the bridges.

"It was just about sunrise; the fog

had lifted a little from the river, but no one could see me from above. I heard the washerwomen laughing on the other side of the arch, but neither could they see me. On my side, by the landing-place, the water was smooth. I took off my blouse and tied it by the sleeves around me under my arms. Then I took the tulle and wound it around my head and wrapped my neck and arms in it; there was yard upon yard of it, little used. Then I leaned over and looked into the river. I wanted to see, monsieur, if I could look like the figure of the woman with the child in her arms that I had seen so often in the cathedral. She, too, had tulle on her head. I kept looking. What I saw there in the

river pleased me. I heard nothing — not even the washerwomen. I looked and looked till the face down there blurred, and the roughening of the water made me look up. There was a man in a boat just under the arch. He was at work with something; I could not tell what it was. But when he looked up, he sang out to me:—

"'For the love of God, little one, don't move! Be quiet — look into the river again — don't stir — there, now, just a minute — wait!'

"I did just as he told me, monsieur: — looked into the water and did not know why I did it, for there was nothing to see. I looked until I couldn't see even the water, and the first thing I knew a boat shot up to

the landing-steps right under my nose, and the man held up a large piece of paper.

"'Look there, my little queen, queen of heaven that you are!'

"That's what he said, monsieur, and he held it away off, for, near to, it was all blurred as if the roughening of the water had shaken his hand; and I saw on the paper a face in the water — the face I had seen in the river, or the face of that figure I had seen in Our Lady. I could not tell which. I only knew it was beautiful.

"He was just as kind as you are, monsieur. He turned his back while I tore off the tulle and flung into my blouse. I was sure it was I, myself,

when I felt the rag-sack between my shoulders. Then he asked me, just as you did, monsieur, to get a bite with him as it was so early; but I was afraid I was late, and dared not stay. He asked me to come again at sunset. He said it would help him in his work, and I promised him — how could I help it? — when he spoke so to me, not as you, monsieur, with all your kindness, have ever spoken, as if he could not do without me. I promised to meet him again there at sunset; and because I did that once, I wanted to twice — thrice.

"I went again and again; at sunset, at midnight, whenever he wanted me, I was there. I could not help it. There were such feasts on the river.

He used to take me out in the boat and make my face all ways, once with the moonlight on it and once with the sunset full in my eyes. He promised me so much in his gay voice: — 'No more hunger; no more rags, rags and cold.'

"He promised me more, for I had told him of that hunger in my heart — how I had no mother, could have none; and out there on the river he told me that if I could not have a mother, I could, at least, be one — that was the next best thing — and hold my child in my arms like the beautiful figure in Our Lady; my child and his child, he said. I suppose you know all these things, monsieur, but he said much I could not under-

stand; it was enough to hear his voice when he said it. He wanted me to go away and live with him somewhere down the river, and for good; but I told him it would be a point of honor to tell Monsieur Jean, and you, monsieur; that I would go after I had told you both. He was angry then, and would not ask me to come again for days and days. It was then I was so miserable; it was then you asked me that question out there in the porch of Notre Dame, and that 'word' set me to thinking: — something was not all right. After I ran away from you, I went back to Our Lady, and when I found you were gone, I went in and knelt by the figure of the woman with the child in her arms. I kept saying

that 'word' over and over; I thought it might help me.

"I tried to tell Monsieur Jean that night; but he put me off, and of the women I dared not ask.

"One night, after you had gone away, monsieur, I had been out with him on the river. It was late when I left him; the bells were ringing midnight when I crossed the Pont de l'Archevêché and I dared not go back to the Buttes-Chaumont for fear of the women in the loft. So I hurried on to Notre Dame. I crept into the shadow of the great walls on the river side.

"The night was warm, but I shook with cold or burned with fever. My teeth chattered; a hundred hammers

seemed pounding against my eyeballs. There was a rushing as of water in my ears; the bells rang out so loud it seemed as if the whole city must hear: — 'No more rags, Nanette, rags and cold, hunger and cold.' There was no rest for me so near the cathedral.

"I bore it as long as I could, then, just before daybreak as the mist began to lift from the river, I dragged myself back to the spot I had left at midnight. A foolish thought, he might still be there, led me on; but instead, I found three men — you know the kind, monsieur, that drag the Seine with their nets — hard at work. I could not leave them until I had seen *It!* A fear was upon me; I was afraid; who could know what

might have happened since midnight? He had asked so much of me, and I had denied him all, nor knew why I did it when it was so hard. As I stood there straining my eyes to watch them pull in the net, I heard them talking together: —

"'Is it a good haul?' said one.

"'Sacre — no; it's a double-catch,' said another.

"'One of the dabster's dolls; the harpies saw her hanging about here last night watching the little paint-pot who was baiting another over there by the bridge — young fry, this time,' said a third with a laugh from which I would have fled had not that weighted net held me there with feet of lead. I grew sick and faint at the

words, for I was beginning to understand, monsieur.

"'There's no luck with them,' said one.

"'Hé! but there is, though.' The first one laughed under his breath. I leaned nearer through the fog. I could just see the face, a woman's, beneath the water. The man reached in and clutched a bit of gold about the neck.

"'Hands off!' he muttered, as the others landed the net. 'Might's right this time.' He gave them a look from which they shrank away like whipped curs.

"I crept nearer and looked again at the 'double-catch.' Monsieur — how can I tell you? — I understood

then: the woman had not waited to be a mother. I looked again as they held the lantern close to her ears and hands — I had seen that face before! But where? I put my hand to my head for something was swimming in the fog before my eyes; those lips were parting, monsieur, parting and smiling. I heard a voice, gay and sweet: — 'Oh, anything but that, child!' And I trembled with a fierce joy, for I knew that the woman before me was none other than she who had helped to starve me, by denying me that kiss and by her scorn of what I was; and that thus, at last, she had come to be the grave of her own child!

"I turned fiend, monsieur, and was glad at the sight.

"The man was prying open the gold locket with his jackknife. Seven devils possessed me to see. I went close up behind him; I looked again as he held it in the light of the lantern.

"'That's the same,' he said. He pried out the picture with the point of the blade, but not before I had had a good look at it, monsieur, and flipped it far out into the river.

"'To the devil,' he muttered. He pocketed the case.

"Monsieur, I had had one glimpse — how can I tell you? Even now that it is past — I have no words — of him who had promised me all, *All!* — This then was what it meant! Oh, I understood, I understood all — no need for more.

"'Fool, fool!' I shrieked. I was crazed. I fled along the embankment; up the steps; along the quay, over the bridge, shrieking 'Fool, fool!' at every turn. As I passed the morgue, I thought I heard the dead mocking me with their weak voices: —

"'No more rags, poor fool — no more hunger and cold — painter's tool, poor fool!'

"I ran as one runs in a nightmare: long leaps into nothing; gasping breaths of air thick and hot as melted resin. I was trying to shriek louder and louder to drown those voices of the dead, yet I knew I made no sound. The houses fell on me without crushing me. The streets opened like traps to trip me. The gutters were rivers

through which I tried in vain to swim; I sank deeper with every struggle. I fell at last in the blind alley by the sheds, and knew no more.

"The women told me afterwards that Monsieur Jean found me and took me into his house; but when, at last, I opened my eyes, I was in my old place in the loft, but not on the burlap. I tried to lift my head to look at Our Lady, but there was no strength in me. Night and morning a woman brought me warm milk and fruit. When I asked who sent it, she placed her finger on her lips: — 'Hush.' I dared not ask again. After a little I could lean out of the window into the sun and air; in another week I crawled down into the shed to thank

Monsieur Jean; but he took no thanks.

"'You'll be out again, soon, and make up for lost time, eh?' That was all he said, and turned his back on me before I could answer. Lost time! I had been six weeks in the loft, the women said.

"In a few days I shouldered my pick and started for Rue Lafitte, but the fever was still in my bones and they ached so that I had to give it up; I was glad enough to get into Our Lady's without having dropped but twice to the pavement on the way. I dragged myself along from pillar to pillar, and when I came to a dark corner sank down on my sack. I must have lain there and slept all day,

for when I awoke and looked about me it was no longer dark. The sun was shining against the round windows and all the place was running with different colors like the Seine, monsieur, when a rainbow hangs over it.

"I got upon my knees in the shadow of the great stone pillar, but was too weak to stand; so knelt by it, and, partly clasping it with my arms, pressed my aching head against it again and again. Then there was a low call from somewhere: —

"'Nanette, little Nanette.' I thought the very stones of Our Lady were speaking. I only clung the closer.

"'Nanette, poor little heart, it's I, Linspré. You're not afraid?'

"Afraid, monsieur, when his voice sounded as his arms felt that night in the square when I tried to steal!

"'Afraid!' I repeated. I laughed aloud in my joy.

"He put his arms close about me, holding me closer and more close, till I cried upon his breast. Then he spoke: —

"'You are mine, little one; did you think I would leave you so alone? — so all alone? Nanette, I tell you I love you, do you hear? Look up, I love you. Do you not know how near I have been to you always?'

"Then I found voice, monsieur. 'Always, Linspré, always?' I sobbed.

"'Yea, always, Nanette. Here — listen!'

"He took my head with his hand and held it hard against his heart. 'Do you hear it now, Nanette?' he said; 'so it has throbbed for you since that morning ten long years ago when the "black wolf" flung you upon it. Don't you remember?'

"I could scarce hear the words his heart beat so against my ear; but I made some sign, for I understood.

"'And that night on the square,' he went on, 'when I caught you away from sin — do you remember that too? And that other night by the river —'

"'Linspré!' I almost screamed, for his voice was terrible, monsieur, but he laid his hand upon my mouth: —

"'Hush, hush, fear naught; — by

the river, I say, when that painter-devil tried to blacken your white soul — I was with you then, I say, ready to save both you and me. See!'

"He put his hand into his blouse and drew out a knife, monsieur, long and sharp. He held it out from the shadow of the pillar and twirled it in the red and blue lights.

"'For *him*, Linspré?' I could only whisper.

"'Nay, nay, for you, little one, you first, then for me! Never for him — the hell-hound was not worth the blood-letting; but for you and me, we two together —'

"'Linspré — you would not — have — Linspré, Linspré!'

"I could say no more, monsieur; I

broke down. He laid his cheek against mine and whispered: —

"'Listen, Nanette, till I tell you how I have said these ten years: — "She is mine — mine alone; but I will try her with hunger and cold. She shall freeze and starve, but her soul must be white. She shall love —" tremble not, poor little heart — "ay, love shall she till the fever burn out the sweet life if need be, but her soul must be white." I watched you by night and by day, for your honor was mine. And now —' Oh, monsieur, how his voice rang in my ears! — 'now you have stood the test; hunger and cold, fever and devil's fire you have withstood. Your body broken, your feet stumbling, so I found you in the

blind alley and took you — home. Tell me, can you love this Linspré now?'

"Monsieur," she leaned to me, "let me whisper to you — I may tell you, for you alone have understood; at that moment I felt that at last my mother had blessed me, and you may know my answer for to-morrow is my wedding day! One thing more I may tell you: — Just as we were going, Linspré took the knife, and, rolling it in the empty rag-sack, left it in the shadow of the pillar.

"'See,' he said, 'we will leave them here with Our Lady — she careth for all.'

"Ah, he little knew how she cared — but you know, you, too, understand now, don't you, monsieur?"

You may guess my answer, comrades.

"Monsieur," her voice rang out joyfully upon the night — a preconcerted signal, I fancy — "to-morrow is my wedding day; you will come, yes?"

"Come? Indeed I will," I said, "but what will Linspré —" A low whistle sounded near us; the bells were ringing midnight. Nanette started to her feet.

"There he is now — I must go; to-morrow then!" She waved her pick and sped down the path.

Did I say that "my soul was on its knees"?

Well, it is a night for confession. I may say it to you, my friends, it will do you no harm: — as I took my way slowly homewards in the early

morning hours, I had leisure for many thoughts, many and curious ones. I lingered on the Pont de l'Archevêché, gazing at Notre Dame. True life, true art; the wages of sin in the one as in the other — death; and nothing less than immortality the reward — mark well — in art as in life, of honest purpose striving valiantly against discouragement, temptation, misery, contempt, sin even, towards adequate fulfilment. Over yonder in the loft of the ragpickers' hive, lay little Nanette as pure as the moonlight touching the Seine at my feet. Here before me towered the majestic pile, an eloquent Sinai, of human artisanship to be sure, but for that very reason honored of the good God in that he

had deigned to thunder from its pinnacles for the salvation of one ragpicker's soul.

My friends, you are young yet, and the nineteenth century is old, but twenty-five years from now when that order is reversed, you will think of my words when I say that, night before last, as I stood silent, thoughtful on the Pont de l'Archevêché, gazing at Notre Dame and pondering its influence on this waif of humankind with a soul, I understood for the first time in my life how the Alpha of Art and the Omega of Human Life may clasp hands, so completing the circle of the Infinite.

I had lingered long, too long, for

the clocks were striking three; but before I turned my face towards Rue Lafitte, I looked once more at Our Lady. The moonlight graced her shadowy arms that seemed raised in benediction upon the vast sleeping life of the city at her feet. . . .

It was time to close my eyes, and nothing but the rumble of a donkey-cart beneath my window could have opened them at the unheard-of hour of five in the morning. I sprang to the shutters, and looked out. Sure enough, there they were! Donkey-cart, white bulldog, Linspré, and Nanette! The donkey brayed, the bulldog roared, Linspré laughed in his rich bass, and Nanette cried out joyfully: —

"Good morning, Monsieur Up-before-the-sun!" at the same time presenting me with a huge bouquet, the dew of the flower market still upon it, on the end of her pick.

Uncork that bottle on the shelf behind you, Cupidon, — genuine Beaujolais; its fellow I drank last night at Nanette's wedding. There is no reason why we should not celebrate again. Fill to the brim, each of you, my yearlings. Here's a health — clink — clink! Ah! I know by the sound you are all her well-wishers; here's a health, I say, to my little Madame Ragpicker and, your reverence in all honor, gentlemen, Notre Dame of Paris.

THE END